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>> killed. With any illicit activity, when you get to talking big money, those are the things that go on, on the outskirts.”

In addition to the 93 misdemeanor citations written for animal cruelty at the 2010 bust in Edmonson County, Hopson said there were several felony charges as well, such as organized crime and promoting gambling.

“Our office looks at more serious crimes,” Hopson said. “We don’t believe any crimes are OK, but we primarily look into mid- and upper-level drug dealers. What we have found is that often mid- and upper-level drug dealers participate in such acts as cockfighting.”

THE HOPE OF HELP

KRS 525.130 also covers many other forms of abuse unrelated to fighting animals. In recent years, numerous county animal shelters and private, so-called rescue shelters have been brought to public attention for the extreme neglect and inhumane conditions to which dogs and cats have been subjected.

In March 2008, police raided a Jackson County private animal shelter, Animal Assist, and found more than 115 starving, disease-infected dogs — 40 of the dogs were found dead or dying. Seventeen dead dogs were found inside the home with 13 of those found inside a freezer in the home’s basement. Outside, dozens of other dogs had apparently been eating the remains of the other dead dogs, news reports said. The owners were charged with 117 counts each of animal cruelty.

In 2004, Kentucky adopted a Humane Shelter Law intended to provide increased protections to the stray and abandoned companion animals of the state. The legislation required every county to operate, or enter into agreements with other counties operating, an animal shelter that meets minimum standards for basic care, such as the provision of food, water, shelter, public access and proper euthanasia. Counties were given three years to comply with these standards.

However, well after the three-year deadline, many counties throughout the commonwealth

▲ In 2010, the newly built Robertson County Animal Shelter received its certificate of occupancy, providing a cleaner, safer environment for the county’s rescued animals.

◀ Robertson County Dog Warden Staci Johnson interacts with one of the pets at the shelter. Her determination, hard work and care for the animals has made a huge difference in Robertson County’s shelter.